

# **PRESS RELEASE**

## **Congressman John Conyers, Jr.**

**Fourteenth District, Michigan  
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary  
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus**

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**FOR RELEASE: November 27, 2002**

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Johnson (202) 225-6906

### ***Conyers Criticizes Bush Administration Decision to Seal Thimerosal Records***

Representative John Conyers, Jr., the Ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, today issued the following letter to Attorney General John Ashcroft and HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson regarding their decision to seal records relating to potential links between thimerosal and autism and other neurological disorders in children:

November 27, 2002

The Honorable John D. Ashcroft  
Attorney General of the United States  
U.S. Department of Justice  
10<sup>th</sup> and Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20530

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson  
Secretary of Health and Human Services  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear General Ashcroft and Secretary Thompson:

I write to obtain information concerning your decision to seek to seal documents relating to claims that the mercury-based preservative in vaccines, thimerosal, caused autism and other neurological disorders in children. As you know, there has been a significant controversy concerning the decision by House Republicans to insert language in the homeland security bill retroactively limiting the liability of thimerosal's manufacturer, Eli Lilly. This decision only compounds these problems. To be frank, it is as though you first robbed the bank and are now attempting to hide the evidence of the harm.

Given this controversy and the concerns for the rights of the families in pending lawsuits concerning thimerosal, I would appreciate it if you would provide me a detailed description of the rationale for your request, both from a public policy and a legal perspective.

In addition, in order to better understand the individuals and groups that your offices obtained input from in order to make this and related decisions, I would like to receive the following:

1. An itemization of all outside groups and persons that you and representatives of your Departments and the Bush Administration met with regarding the issue of protecting the manufacturer of thimerosal from liability, as well as whether or not documents relating to thimerosal claims should be sealed, along with the dates and a description of each contact.
2. A copy or description of all written or electronic memos, emails, phone messages, and other communications to or involving your Departments or the Administration concerning the matters described in #1, above.

3. An itemization of all contacts between yourselves and representatives of your Departments and other members of the White House staff concerning the matters described in #1 above, whether orally or in writing, along with the dates and a description of each contact.

I am hopeful that you are as interested as I am in providing a full and prompt accounting of this matter. As a result I look forward to hearing from you by noon on December 6, 2002, so that we can discuss an appropriate deadline and means for your disseminating this information. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact me at 202-225-6504.

Sincerely,

John Conyers, Jr.  
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.  
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary

##107-218##